

On Deconstruction and the Proof of Platonism

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On a superficial overview, the upshot of the work of the French thinker Jacques Derrida seems to be to make nonsense of all human discourse and communication. When one looks at it more carefully, this impression is abundantly confirmed. Still, there are lessons of great importance to be learned from it; and I shall try in what follows to show what they are.

The following argument seems worth considering:

If it is possible to speak the truth about anything, then some kind of Platonism is true.

But no kind of Platonism is true.

Therefore it is not possible to speak the truth about anything.

It would be, I dare say, very generally maintained that the first premiss is false. But one might say that one of the main consequences of Derrida's principles, and perhaps the main upshot of his arguments, is that it is true. Given both the truth of the first premiss, and that of the proposition that it is possible to speak the truth about some things at least, then it would seem to follow that some kind of Platonism is true.

John Searle's dispute with Derrida is well-known. Searle has been taken to task for the crudity of the contrast which he alleged to exist between 'serious' and 'nonserious' discourse, a contrast which he believed threw light on the distinction between fictional talk and talk concerned with stating facts¹. H. Staten suggests that, as a background to one's assessment of this dispute, one should keep in mind Derrida's 'dazzling reading' of some of the most difficult modern authors². Yet those who are sensitive to the most refined distinctions may still overlook the more obvious ones; and I believe that Searle had a point. A description of a meeting of city councillors in Derby at some date in 1988 is obviously, in most senses of 'serious' at least, a less 'serious' document than *King Lear*. But it makes certain kinds of commitment which *King Lear* does not. It is not relevant to the criticism of *King Lear* that there was no king of Britain of that name whose later life was anything like what is narrated in Shakespeare's play. But if the author of the description of the meeting of city councillors states that Councillor X was present at the meeting, when he was not; or that Councillor Y was absent from the meeting, when actually she was present; or that a certain

item of business was not discussed at the meeting, when in fact it was; then we regard these things as defects in that kind of document. Derrida's undoubted skill in shedding light on various types of fictive discourse does not directly imply that he articulates, or even that on his principles he is capable of articulating, the difference between the sort of talk which commits itself to telling the truth about particular states of affairs, and the sort that does not.

Fundamental to Derrida's enterprise is his criticism of those assumptions which he calls 'metaphysical', and which he complains have dominated the European philosophical tradition from Plato to Husserl. A crucial feature of such 'metaphysics' is a series of contrasts that it sets up between pairs of terms, in each of which the former is supposed to mark something superior, the latter to mark a falling-away from this—good as opposed to evil, truth as opposed to falsity, essential as opposed to accidental, and so on³ It is worth noting that there is a characteristic *coyness*, as one might put it, about Derrida, which makes it hard to say whether he is implying, on the one hand, that we might somehow conceivably *do without* such distinctions; or whether he is rather reminding us that we should constantly make ourselves aware of what we are doing when we are employing them⁴. If the former, it appears to me that what he is saying is at once absurd and dangerous. It is false, as opposed to true, that the moon is made of green cheese; it is bad, as opposed to good, to torture children for fun; and it is both absurd and dangerous to entertain serious doubts on these matters. One notices that Derrida's polemic is directed mainly against philosophers and other *savants*; he is curiously quiet about the judgments of science or of common sense. Is he really saying that here as well we have no use for distinctions like those between true and false, good and bad? If so, to take him seriously is to imply that one might just as well say that the moon is made of green cheese as that it is not; that one might as well torture children for fun as not. It is indeed the case that a certain kind of moralism, or a certain sort of obsession with truth, may inhibit the free play of imagination. It is also the case that an unduly restricted or dogmatic view of what is true or false, or of what is good or bad, may distort both our view of how things are in the world and our moral sensitivity and perceptiveness. So far as Derrida's writing acts against such tendencies, it has a very useful function. (To say so, is to remind oneself, is to commit oneself to another distinction which has the hallmark of 'metaphysics' in Derrida's sense, between the useful and the useless.) But so far as it seems to subvert the very standards that we apply to knowing what is true and what is good, it is quite another matter.

For Derrida does appear to be impugning, in much of what he writes, the assumption of common sense, and of science as generally understood, that by means of our conceptual apparatus, when this is

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rightly applied, we can come to think and speak truly about a world which exists prior to and independent of our conceptual apparatus. For if we are to do so, we have to follow certain norms, of *good* rather than *bad* reasoning, of *pure* reasoning applied to evidence rather than reasoning contaminated by the *impurity* of emotional attachment to our prejudices, as a means of getting at the *truth* rather than coming or continuing to believe *falsely*. But all of these contrasts seem to be impugned by Derrida as aspects of what he calls 'metaphysics'.

Someone might say, 'But isn't it very courageous to face the anxiety which confronts or ought to confront us all, that objective truth may be unobtainable, that the world may not be knowable by us at all?'⁵ But I do not think that the supposition that evokes such anxiety is after all a coherent one. The fact is, I believe (though I have no space to argument the point at length here), that (1) it is self-destructive to deny that we can make true judgments, or to deny that we can make judgments which are better grounded than their contradictories; (2) the world of reality is nothing other than what true judgments are about, and what judgments which are better founded than their contradictories tend to be about. It seems that these principles are central to what Derrida castigates as 'logocentrism', which he significantly admits that he cannot ultimately escape⁶. What 'logocentrism' amounts to in the long run, I believe, is the thesis that the world is knowable by means of the concepts expressible through our language; that it has a nature and structure which makes this possible. Derrida is of course by no means unaware of the theological implications of 'logocentrism'; is not the permeability of the world to 'logos', to reason as expressed in words, a strong hint that at least something analogous to human reason is at the base of it?⁷

I believe that a great deal of Derrida's appeal is due to the assumption that the sort of search for truth about things which is exemplified in science, and the sort of striving for the good as opposed to the bad which is shown in serious ethical concern, is inimical to the 'free play of signifiers' and the feast of imagination and intellectual creativity which can result from this. I judge this to be a very great mistake. That true statements about what is so and what is good are *one very important aim* of language by no means implies that it is the *only* aim. What is and ought to be *conceived* or *imagined* goes far beyond what is or ought to be *stated*. And not only are the free play of conception and imagination of intrinsic value, quite apart from any use they may have as means to knowledge of what is true and what is good; their employment is vitally necessary if we are to be alive to the distinction between what is really true and what only seems to be true, between what is good and what merely appears to be good. What is true and what is good are after all not known once and for all; their apprehension requires constant liveliness of senses, mind and heart.

Oddly enough, there is an assumption which appears to be shared by

Derrida and Plato, that there is an ineluctable conflict between the proper use of the mind to find out the truth about things and to conform itself to virtue, and the sort of exercise of imagination and indulgence of feeling which is encouraged by much literature and art. I have argued at some length to the contrary elsewhere⁸; I can only sketch my case here. It seems that we advance in knowledge of things by attending to the evidence of our senses; by envisaging a range of possibilities which might account for it; and by judging to be true the possibility which is best supported by the evidence. The arts give us the satisfaction that they do by enhancing in us the capacities to experience and to imagine, and to envisage possibilities; they are not apt directly to involve us in judgment about what is so. However, the more we exercise these capacities for conception and imagination, the more likely we are to be in a position to judge truly, both about what is so in the world of common sense or science, and about what is of positive value. Hence there is no conflict whatever in principle between science and morality on the one hand, and the practice of the arts on the other; on the contrary, the latter enhances the former.

I have already said what I think to be crucial to what Derrida calls 'logocentrism'. The contrast between speech and writing, on which he himself lays such stress⁹, I take to be a side issue. I concede to him that one might just as well say that speech is a debased form of writing as *vice versa*. Through both speech and writing, we may express judgments which are true or false, or comparatively well- or ill-grounded. Speech seems more appropriate than writing in some contexts, for example in a teaching situation where one has to react quickly to the responses of pupils, or in conversation; writing is certainly better when one wants a relatively permanent record of what is stated, as in a scientific treatise or the record of an important event. Derrida seems correct in suggesting that any general tendency to devalue writing in relation to speech, for all that is exemplified by many influential thinkers such as Plato and Rousseau, is misconceived¹⁰.

One is inclined to say that well-grounded judgment depends upon certain 'givens'; I apply my given reason to given experience. That water consists of hydrogen and oxygen, rather than being itself a chemical element, or a compound of other elements, is a hypothesis confirmed by reason in experience countless times. Again, there is massive evidence available in experience to support what is surely the reasonable judgment, that the first name of the President of the United States of America in 1988 was Ronald as opposed to Raquel or Rabadash. The 'givens' on which adequately-based judgments may be said to depend, it is plausible to claim in each case, are a certain range of experience, and the capacity to reason about it. Furthermore, it is plausible to maintain that my experience is in some sense directly *present* to me, and that I am *present* to myself, as Descartes notoriously argued, as a being applying

reason to my experience. Short of these 'givens' which are 'present' to me, it is not unreasonable to ask, how can I have any foundation for what I claim to know?

It is usual in contemporary analytical philosophy to attack such a 'myth of the given'; and, as has been pointed out by Richard Rorty and others, this is closely parallel to Derrida's 'deconstruction' of the 'metaphysics of presence'¹¹. But short of 'foundations' in what is thus 'given' or 'present', it is not easy to see how a total relativism is to be avoided—such that 'the moon is made of green cheese' and 'the torturing of children for fun is right' are just as 'true' from some point of view as their contradictories are from our own. Views of the world differ widely from one another; unless there is some 'given' to which to appeal in adjudicating between them, how is one to be determined as better than another by anything other than individual or social *fiat*? And is not the opinion that views of the world have no intrinsic privilege over one another the very essence of relativism? But unfortunately, of course, even to propound relativism is to presuppose that such a privilege is to be had, and to take advantage of it; one could be a relativist, and admit that the position contradictory to relativism was equally true from another viewpoint which was intrinsically just as good as one's own?

But the arguments which I have already sketched are a means of establishing foundations of knowledge after all, and so turning the flank of relativism. If reality is what is known to us by means of true judgment, and tends to be known by us so far as we ensure that our judgments are properly grounded, it may be conceded to deconstructionists that our knowledge of reality is mediated; that reality is on the whole not directly 'present' to us in experience. On the other hand, there is every reason to revive the classical empiricist and foundationalist conviction that experience, both of the data of sensation and of the conscious self as operating upon these data, does provide the *basis* for our knowledge of reality.

Deconstructionists are right to draw attention to the manner in which philosophers and others are apt to use a sort of rhetoric to urge that their own work is structured by logic and aimed at truth, as opposed to being dominated by rhetoric¹². But given the incoherence of the views that truth is unobtainable, or that people have no reliable way of arriving at it, the distinction has then to be made between the kind of rhetoric which tends to promote the discovery of truth, and that which tends to hinder it. (One is reminded of the remark made about Macaulay's style; that it was one in which it was impossible to speak the truth.) My speaking or writing on, say, a religious or political topic, may be infested by a 'rhetoric' which serves to whip emotion and to militate against the use of reason and attention to evidence; on the other hand, my manner of using words may have exactly the opposite tendency. One may, of course, as is often done, persuasively define 'rhetoric' in such a way that 'rhetoric' is by its very

nature opposed to rationality and the honest search for truth; in this case, one simply needs to coin another term for that element of 'rhetoric' which is inevitable in any use of language. I believe that one positive use of deconstruction is to draw attention to elements of 'rhetoric' (in the pejorative sense) which may lurk beneath the surface of professedly non-rhetorical uses of language. As Aristotle remarked, there is an element of ostentation in the exaggerated plainness of Spartan attire¹³.

It is a curious feature of deconstruction, that what is at first sight an extremely radical critical thrust turns on the last analysis to be quite half-hearted. The 'logocentrism' which it purports to attack appears, on its own admission, to be inevitable; its assaults on logocentrism being themselves conceded to be implicated in logocentrism. It looks as though everything after all is left just as it is; what is implicitly critical of every conceivable thesis is effectively critical of none. No wonder Derrida is coy about the practical effects of his ideas on politics and university teaching¹⁴. The critical principles which I have sketched as an alternative to deconstruction are by no means so broken-backed. Some ancient opinions on metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and so on turn out to be deeply incoherent and based on error; others to be well-founded after all. One of these is what I have argued to be essential to 'logocentrism'. It is self-destructive to deny that we are capable of coming to true or well-founded judgments; reality is nothing other than what true judgments are about and well-founded judgments tend to be about. So the language, and for that matter the writing, in which we express our judgments, is after all in principle capable of describing reality.

In fact, one can readily conceive of a kind of deconstruction which was founded on these principles, but which was much clearer than its prototype on the issue of which opinions are to be rejected, which to be provisionally or definitively accepted, and why. Following a terminological hint in Derrida himself¹⁵ (and not being too discouraged by these somewhat Trollopian suggestions) let us call this 'archdeconstruction'. Archdeconstruction would be fundamentally directed against those theses in epistemology, metaphysics and ethics which contradicted, at least when their implications were fully worked out, the proposition that we can come to judge truly and for good reason, and that the world is nothing other than what true judgments are about and judgments for good reason tend to be about. So-called 'eliminative materialism' would be a good example of a position liable to attack by archdeconstruction; since it can be inferred from it that we never really come to judge truly or for good reason, as talk in such terms is mere 'mentalism' destined to disappear in favour of a scientific psychology. Unfortunately, of course, it also can be inferred that no-one could ever accept such a scientific psychology on the grounds that he had good reason to do so.

Archdeconstruction would concede to deconstruction that human

thought and speech are strongly influenced by hierarchies of mutually-opposed concepts such as those of truth and falsity, good and bad, pure and impure. It would also concede that the application of these opposed concepts constantly needs the most stringent attention; we should always be on the look-out for evidence that what we have previously assumed to be true may be false, what we have previously assumed to be good may be bad, and *vice versa*. But it asserts clearly and distinctly what deconstructionists seem only regretfully and in spite of themselves to concede, that concepts like true, false, good, bad, really do have an application. I have already said something about the way in which the 'hierarchical opposition' between truth and falsity may be vindicated. Much the same kind of thing applies to that between the good and the bad. To take Derrida's work seriously is to presuppose that its production and publication were responsible, i.e. good, acts, intended to advance knowledge on the matters with which they deal, rather than, say, just to make fools of everybody. I do not care for peaceful co-existence between good and evil, true and false; and if I did, it would follow that I would have to admit the pointlessness of Derrida's polemics against the many authors against whom he has mounted his criticism.

It has been said that to deconstruct a discourse is 'to show how it underlines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical propositions on which it relies'¹⁶. Either this process can be applied to all discourses, or it cannot. In the former case, if all discourse which purports to say what is the case can equally be deconstructed, one is left in the position ascribed to Cratylus, of being able to say nothing. Since no-one can really remain long in this position, one merely resorts once more to one's initial prejudices—so the effect of what is at first sight utterly sceptical and destructive, as I have said, is ultimately to leave everything just as it was. If every position, including that of the deconstructionist, results equally in *aporiae*¹⁷, any position on matters of fact or of value is as good as any other—one might as well be a flat-earther as believe what is alleged in the last issue of *Science Today*, or commit oneself to genocide as well as to the advancement of science or the relief of hunger in the Third World. But if deconstruction can be applied negatively only to some positions, or to all positions only in some respects, it may then amount to a critical practice which will tend, by subjecting every judgment to examination, and preventing it from being taken for granted, to confirm some judgments of fact as much as it falsifies others. And this could be effectively done by archdeconstruction. If in some cases it would subvert an argument by (in Jonathan Culler's words) 'identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed grounds of argument'¹⁸, in other cases it would corroborate it by vindicating the 'supposed grounds' as real.

A case in point is Nietzsche's allegedly 'deconstructive' account of causality in *The Will to Power*. We are apt, Nietzsche points out, to take it for granted that effects are dependent on causes; yet if we reflect upon our

knowledge relations, we find that there is a sense in which just the opposite is the case. 'In the phenomenism of the "inner world" we invert the chronology of cause and effect. The basic fact of our experience is that the cause gets imagined after the effect has occurred.'¹⁹ Thus deconstruction reverses the hierarchical scheme which seems so obvious a characteristic of causality; it seems after all that it is the effect which 'causes the cause to become a cause'²⁰. Archdeconstruction would indicate rather quickly that though the effect is likely to be prior to the cause in the order of *knowledge*, the cause is prior to the effect in the order of *reality*. Human beings discover the measles germ by studying the disease called measles and inquiring how it comes about (thus measles is before the measles germ in the order of knowledge); yet the measles germ really causes measles, in that, once knowledge has progressed beyond a certain point, it is known that, unless the measles germ is present and active, there cannot exist the human illness of measles. Insofar as Nietzsche's argument is supposed to show that there is some deep incoherence or confusion implicit in causal reasoning as such, it is shown up by archdeconstruction as a mere sophism.

Deconstructionists say that one should not infer, from the fact that a concept has been deconstructed, that it ought to be abandoned; on the contrary, the deconstructionists are liable to be depending on the deconstructing concepts in the very act of deconstructing them. The use of the very conceptions they are undermining, in the process of undermining them, commits the critics to a stance, as it has been expressed, 'not of sceptical detachment but of unwarrantable involvement'. It has been lamented that many find this feature of deconstruction unappealing, difficult to understand or accept²¹. From the point of view of archdeconstruction, there is every reason to find such a stance unpalatable. If to be committed to a concept or a conceptual scheme is 'unwarrantable', then one ought not to be committed to it. If to believe that positrons or quasers exist is just as 'unwarrantable' as to believe that the earth is flat, then one should believe neither. The fact is, as I have said, that a procedure which is in principle critical of every conceivable position is effectively critical of none; and the complacent acceptance of *aporiae* to which it leads is the beginning of the end of the effective use of reason. If deconstruction is to be an effective instrument of criticism, it must be backed by an account, itself not liable to deconstruction, of what it would be for a judgment to be well- as opposed to be ill-founded.

The notion of the meaning of being as presence, as Derrida sees it, brings most of traditional metaphysics in its train—including 'presence of the object to sight as *eidos*, presence as substance/essence/existence (*ousia*), ... self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity ... Logocentrism would thus be bound up in the determination of the being of the existent as present.'²² It seems almost tactlessly elementary to point out that *eidos*, as a technical term in Platonic philosophy, precisely does *not* mean what is 'present to sight'; it is what may be grasped by

understanding, of which the 'sight' suggested by the etymology of the term is merely a metaphor. That this metaphorical basis infects the technical use of the term to such a degree as to invalidate it is not shown by Derrida. The traditional metaphysics which derives from Plato spells out what is presupposed by our common use of language, and even more by science, that by means of the concepts forged by our understanding we are capable, in principle at least, of grasping the real world. The world as so grasped and to be grasped consists of things (substances) characterized by properties, of which it can be known both *what* they are (their essence) and *that* they are (their existence). These are to be known by subjects who are in some sense directly aware of (present to) both their experience, and themselves as reasoning about their experience (as in the Cartesian *cogito*).

However, as Derrida sees it, the metaphysics of presence always encounters an intractable problem; instances of the present offered as grounds invariably proved to be complex constructions. 'What is proposed as a given, an elementary constituent, proves to be a product, dependent or derived in ways that deprive it of the authority of simple or pure presence.' For example, the word 'dog' means something in the way that it does only by contrast with 'dig', 'cod', 'bog', and so on. The sound that is 'present' when one utters it 'is inhabited by traces of the forms one is not uttering, and it can function as signifier only insofar as it consists of such traces.' What applies to the spoken applies of course equally to the written; to quote Derrida, 'each "element"—phoneme or grapheme—is constituted with reference to the trace in it of the forms one is not uttering, and it can be a signifier only insofar as it consists of such traces of other elements of the sequence or system ... Nothing, either in the elements or in the system, is anywhere simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces or traces'²³. Certainly, it is true and significant that the elementary signs out of which we construct words and sentences, whether spoken or written, can only signify by virtue of their relation to and contrast with other such signs. But *in* such relation and *by means of* such contrast, there is no reason why they should not do so; and they clearly can do so at least in some instances, by virtue of the fact that denial that they can do so is self-destructive. If the corresponding assertion has meaning, the terms in which it is expressed must in turn have meaning; this fact is not in the least affected by the fact that they have meaning only by virtue of the sort of mutual relations which have been pointed out by linguists since the time of Saussure.

There *is* an awkwardness about how we are to make sense of a 'given' on which knowledge is supposed to depend; the pointing-out of this awkwardness is a very interesting feature which is common to contemporary philosophers in the analytical (Anglo-Saxon) and continental (phenomenological) tradition. If we depend on 'givens' to speak truly or with good reason about the world, how is the difficulty to be resolved? Once again, I can only sketch an argument which could not be

adequately set out except at much greater length. The primary reference of our language, certainly, is not to private 'givens', but to things and events in the public world. It is only secondarily and derivatively that we can speak of the 'private' worlds constituted by the experience of each of us. Only by virtue, for example, of the fact that we can talk about red physical objects, can we talk about visual data as of red. But this by no means implies that we cannot speak about visual data as of red at all; or even that it may not be useful for us to do so in some context, for example when attempting to describe the basis for our knowledge. The same applies to our awareness of ourselves as subjects operating on data, asking questions, being puzzled, propounding hypotheses, making judgments and so on. We do not learn the meaning of such phrases by somehow sticking labels on private episodes of our mental lives. But having learned them in discourse about others as well as ourselves, we can then use them to get clear the inner processes of our own mental lives²⁴.

There is a sense in which I am directly aware of myself and my experience; but, as is shown by the efforts of philosophers of the phenomenological school, it takes strenuous efforts to spell out just what my awareness amounts to. (It is significant that Derrida's work takes its rise from a criticism of Husserl²⁵.) And, as Derrida is quite correct to imply, simple awareness does not amount to knowledge; knowledge properly speaking of things, and of the subjects who know them and the experience through which they know them, is only to be had in judgments mediated through concepts—it is not a matter of a direct apprehension which somehow bypasses concepts.

What may be regarded as essential to Platonism is belief that the concepts forged by human understanding are capable, at least in principle, of representing the world as it really is. (Platonic 'forms' are that in the real world which corresponds to our acts of understanding²⁶.) The real upshot of Derrida's attack on this 'logocentrism' is to demonstrate its inevitability, given that we are able to talk sense about things at all. In the long run, I suggest, Derrida's significance will be seen to have been that he has set forward in a very startling way the bleak alternative, either incoherent babble, or 'logocentrism' with all its unpalatable metaphysical and indeed theological consequences. As Derrida says, 'It is a question of posing expressly and systematically the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself'²⁶. My complaint is that he does not pose the problem expressly and systematically enough. If he did so, he would come to see the self-destructive nature of the claim that we cannot make well-grounded judgments of fact or value. If he had done this, he would then have been able to apprehend the basic grounds for such judgments, and so have been in a position to distinguish between those aspects of a heritage which tend to be corroborated by a comprehensively critical analysis, and those which tend to be impugned by it. Yet such a

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powerful apologetic for traditional metaphysics seems latent in his whole procedure, that it is sometimes almost irresistible to attribute this as a motive to Derrida himself.

- 1 See H. Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1984), 124, 129.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 129.
- 3 Cf. Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 66; J. Culler, *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 93.
- 4 With regard to the former interpretation, one can hardly wonder at Derrida's admission that the future glimpsed by deconstruction 'can only be proclaimed or presented as a sort of monstrosity' (*Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 5; Culler, *op. cit.*, 158).
- 5 Derrida notes that the apparent 'effacement of the signifier' in speech, which is a prime target of deconstruction, is 'the condition of the very idea of truth' (*Of Grammatology*, 20).
- 6 As Culler puts it, exercises in deconstruction 'do not escape the logocentric premises they undermine; and there is no reason to believe that a theoretical enterprise could ever free itself from those premises' (*op. cit.*, 7). The critic is left 'in a position not of sceptical detachment but of unwarrantable involvement' (*ibid.*, 88).
- 7 As well as Derrida's allusions to 'theologocentrism', the following is notable. In elucidating texts, 'the motif of homogeneity, the theological motive par excellence, is what must be destroyed' (*Positions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 64; Culler, *op. cit.*, 135).
- 8 *The Nature of Aesthetic Value* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 39–45.
- 9 This of course is a recurrent theme of *Of Grammatology*. Cf. also Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), 158; and Culler, *op. cit.*, 89.
- 10 Though Plato's point in the *Phaedrus* seems to be the limited and reasonable one that a speaker can modify his discourse at short notice for the benefit of the listener, in a manner that is not possible with what is committed to writing. Cf. *Phaedrus*, 275d.
- 11 See R. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), chapter 6.
- 12 Cf. Culler, *op. cit.*, 91.
- 13 Aristotle, *Ethics*, IV, 7.
- 14 Cf. the quotation from Derrida's 'The Conflict of the Faculties' in Culler, *op. cit.*, 156.
- 15 Derrida refers to 'arche-writing' in *Of Grammatology* (e.g., 128).
- 16 Culler, *op. cit.*, 86.
- 17 Culler disarmingly remarks that sawing off the branch on which one is oneself sitting is a physically perfectly possible operation (*op. cit.*, 149). But perhaps a closer analogy is with the would-be mass murderer who inadvertently shoots himself before turning his machine-gun on his intended victims.
- 18 Culler, *op. cit.*, 86.
- 19 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*; cited Culler, *loc. cit.*
- 20 Culler, *op. cit.*, 88.
- 21 Culler, *loc. cit.*
- 22 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 12; Culler, *op. cit.*, 92–3.
- 23 Derrida, *Positions* 26. Cf. Culler, *op. cit.*, 100.
- 24 Cf. L. Wittgenstein's classical attack on the notion of a 'private language' in the *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).
- 25 Cf. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
- 26 As John Raven puts it, forms are 'objects of knowledge, apprehended by thought, not senses': *Plato's Thought in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 251.
- 27 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*; quoted Culler, 'Jacques Derrida' in J. Sturrock, ed., *Structuralism and Since* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 175.